Royal British Museum and Archives Research Strategy 2016-21

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Contents

AIM

This document sets out a research strategy for the Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives for the next five years.

The aim of the research strategy is to strengthen the ways in which the Royal BC Museum and Archives generates the greatest possible public benefit through the creation and sharing of substantive new knowledge about British Columbia and the world, based upon the collections and archives it maintains at a time of financial constraint.

FOCUS

The strategy recognizes what is distinctive about our research—the rich archival, biological and artifactual resources it draws upon, the wide audience it serves and the variety of uses to which it is put, including peer-reviewed publications, books, scholarly papers, exhibitions, public programs, learning and online activities and both domestic and international engagement.

The strategy requires all research to be mission-related. It encourages research to explore the unique role of British Columbia as the historical 'gateway to the Americas'[1] where appropriate. It does not prioritize one discipline over another nor specify tightly-defined research themes. Instead, the strategy prioritizes research that: advances knowledge based on our collections and archives; informs the redevelopment of our permanent galleries; and supports the creation of temporary exhibitions.

BACKGROUND

The mission of the Royal BC Museum and Archives is to "promote an understanding of the living landscapes and cultures of British Columbia and engage people in a dialogue about their future". To achieve this we are committed to taking a "leadership role in research and scholarship".

We currently undertake a wide range of research based upon museum collections and archival materials. Research encompasses the fields of botany, zoology, paleontology, earth science, archaeology, ethnology, social history and the history of prints, photography and art. Outputs are varied but focus is principally on peer-reviewed articles aimed at a scholarly audience and non-peer reviewed articles intended for a more general one. Research often involves partnerships with other

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1 British Columbia sits at the core of northwest North America, connecting the Americas to Asia for hundreds of millennia, and acting as a conduit for the flow of people, plants and animals. The rich and diverse landscapes of our province continue to welcome peoples from around the Pacific and remain a gateway to the Americas.

institutions. It attracts in-kind but little financial support (not least because the Royal BC Museum and Archives is ineligible for federal and provincial research grants).

A strategic framework was created in 2013. It included a revised research policy, refreshed Collections and Research Committee and a thematic research plan. But implementation has been undermanaged with little consistent resource, support or direction afforded to researchers. Moreover, research is currently undertaken 'behind the scenes' with limited public interaction and circumscribed outputs—a model that must evolve to accommodate new civic perspectives of learning and knowledge such as 'collective intelligence' and the growth of 'knowledge commons'.[2]

This strategy addresses the above issues by setting out priorities and processes that are together intended to: preserve and enhance the quality of research undertaken; improve the accountability and accessibility of the museum and archives and its researchers; ensure robust project management; and increase institutional understanding of the cost as well as the benefit of research. As such, the strategy provides a focussed but flexible framework for the production of world-class scholarship across all disciplines, while at the same time ensuring that the research activities support the strategic priorities.

The research strategy will guide department heads, curators, collection managers, archivists, research associates and students in determining research subjects, partners, funding and outputs over a three year period. It will, in turn, inform how resources will be allocated and work plans developed, implemented and monitored.

DEFINITIONS

Research is defined as the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.[3]

It is the nature and level of the inquiry that determines whether or not the activity is of relevance to this research strategy, not the subject matter being researched or the status of the individual undertaking it. The inquiry must be systematic and the outcome must be novel. The result of research must have a value beyond its functional use to the museum or its interest to the researcher.[4]

The systematic investigation of the museum and archives visitor demographics **would not** be covered by the strategy if the aim of the research was solely to

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2 **Collective intelligence** is shared or group intelligence that emerges from the collaboration, collective efforts and competition of many individuals, and appears in consensus decision making. **Knowledge commons** refers to information, data and content that is collectively owned and managed by a community of users, particularly over the internet.
3 Oxford English Dictionary
4 National Museum of Australia Research and Scholarship Policy

inform the effective and efficient operation of the museum. However, it **would** be covered if the intention was to enrich or influence public understanding through a peer-reviewed article in, for example, *The Journal of Tourism Research*.

The routine improvement of collections and archival data contained within Access to Memory (AtoM, an open source database for archival record description) or Integrated Museum Management (IMM, a custom-built enterprise system for museum collection data) **would not** be covered by this strategy. However, the systematic investigation and analysis of that data to create new information for use, for example, within a temporary exhibition **would** be covered.

PRINCIPLES

The Royal BC Museum and Archives approach to research will be informed by the following principles.

Values Based

The work of the museum and archives is defined by its mission and supported by strategic, department and individual work plans. How all of that work is undertaken is defined by our values. Thus, all research must demonstrate:

- Accountability — Being answerable for our decisions and actions.
- Community — Developing and sustaining networks both within and outside the museum and archives.
- Creativity — Building an environment that encourages new ways of thinking and working.
- Diversity — Reflecting and responding to the rights and differences of the people the museum and archives serves.
- Partnership — Connecting and cooperating with others to achieve a clear purpose and a mutually beneficial outcome.
- Service — Providing great service to peers and the public by placing organizational objectives ahead of personal goals and creating trust and goodwill through authentic, mutual respect.

Collections and Archives Focused

Researchers possess a passion for, and scholarship within, their area of professional interest. What makes their work exceptional, however, are the extensive opportunities afforded by unfettered access to the museum's unique collections. Thus, all research must substantively relate to the content, care and development of our collections and archival materials.

High in Quality, Considered in Quantity

The Royal BC Museum and Archives is committed to taking a "leadership role in research and scholarship". While an increase in the volume and reach of outputs is desirable, maintaining quality is essential. Emphasis must be placed on the latter with the museum and archives being valued as a centre of high-quality collections and archival-based research. The result should be an increase in the number of research publications that would be recognized by the common consent of external peers as 'central points of reference'—challenging though this is to measure.

Supporting Professional Development

Researchers must have the appropriate skills and experience to develop, deliver, win funding for and lead high-quality research projects. This encompasses the recruitment and retention of appropriately skilled staff, the training, development and management of research careers, and the advancement of teaching roles and supervisory relationships with higher education institutions when appropriate.

Properly Resourced

All research must be properly resourced. Costs and income must be thoroughly understood and accurately monitored. Time commitments must be realistically determined and effectively managed with researchers encouraged to dedicate up to 20% of their time to undertaking, supervising, publishing and presenting research. Researchers must also work in partnership with the Development Department to secure funding for research.

Collaborative and Inter-Disciplinary

The museum and archives must work with institutions, organizations, Indigenous communities and individuals across British Columbia, Canada and internationally to conduct, support and promote research focused on collections and archives. The aim of each partnership is to deliver meaningful outcomes that neither party could produce as effectively or efficiently had it undertaken the activity on its own.

Relevant

Research without relevance is a recipe for public disinterest; research that is relevant to the public is key to civic engagement. The more relevant our research is to contemporary needs, the more valuable and valued the museum and archives will become to the people it serves.

Relevance is both ephemeral and subjective. However, in considering the relevance of our research it is instructive to consider its value to four key constituents:

- The Royal BC Museum and Archives – Does the research support the understanding, care, development and display of the collections and archives?
- Visitors – Does the research help visitors learn, understand and be inspired by the living landscapes of British Columbia?
- British Columbians – Does the research help address pressing issues for the province, in particular does it advance provincial government, federal government, First Nations and/or relevant NGO agendas?
- Global scientific community – Does the research meaningfully contribute to and support the work of researchers (i.e., taxonomists, ecologists and conservation biologists) around the world.

Relevance is not the exclusive preserve of applied research; however, researchers should engage potential beneficiaries of their work at an early stage to ensure that pure research questions are applicable to issues of concern and may yield applied findings.

Communicable to a Range of Audiences

Research must be capable of being communicated across a variety of platforms including exhibitions, public programs, peer-reviewed journals and monographs, conferences and in-house publications in both print and electronic formats.

Measureable

Research outputs must be measurable if they are to be manageable. To this end the Royal BC Museum and Archives must maintain a rolling triennial research plan that defines outputs and measures outcomes on an annual basis by way of researchers' work plans (for staff) and routine reporting out on associate agreements (for research associates and students).

PRIORITIES

Research must deepen our understanding of the living landscapes and cultures of the province and, where appropriate, enrich our appreciation of British Columbia as a gateway to the Americas. Research must support one or more of the following three priorities:

| 1 | Collections and Archives | Research must document collections and archives (by increasing understanding of existing collections and archives as well as those identified for accessioning) and advance knowledge across those subject areas to which our collections and archives relate. |

2	Permanent Galleries	Research must inform the redevelopment of the permanent galleries in accordance with the master plan and gallery redevelopment programs and with due regard for the interpretive plan for each.
3	Temporary Exhibitions	Research must inform the creation of temporary displays and exhibitions in accordance with the temporary exhibitions programs and with due regard for the interpretive plan for each.

PROCESS

Research Committee

The Research Committee oversees the research activities of the Royal BC Museum and Archives. Its responsibilities are:

- To review and endorse a quinquennial research strategy
- To review and endorse a rolling triennial research plan
- To assist in the development of external partnerships and applications for research funding
- To advise on the effective dissemination of research through a variety of means

Its membership comprises of:

- One Board trustee
- Vice President Collections, Knowledge and Engagement
- Head of Knowledge (Secretary)
- Head of Archives, Access and Digital
- External Advisor – First Nations
- External Advisor – Natural History
- External Advisor – Human History
- External Advisor – Archives
- Co-opted discipline specialists as required

The Research Committee meets twice per year, timed to assist the corporate planning process. Board members are informed through the normal board reporting process.

Head of Knowledge

The Head of Knowledge is responsible for:

- Interrogating, distilling and programming research proposals
- Preparing a rolling triennial research plan for review and approval by the Research Committee
- Acting as secretary to the Research Committee
- Supporting researchers in the management of research
- Determining the need for Project Initiation Documents (PIDs)
- Determining the need for Research Groups as required (see below)
- Overseeing the delivery of PIDs, monitoring deliverables and enforcing deadlines
- Reviewing and approving in-year research requests
- Coordinating the public presentation of research at an annual Research Day
- Updating the Research Strategy every five years
- Continuously improving the process of managing research

Researcher

Each research project is delivered by a researcher. The researcher prepares a research proposal. A research proposal comprises key research questions, themes, priorities, outputs, partners and funding sources. It also considers the specific or general relevance of the subject matter to the wider knowledge community and general public as well as opportunities for 'collective intelligence gathering' and the incorporation of inter-disciplinary perspectives. Research proposals are submitted to the Head of Knowledge. The researcher may need to draft a PID for research proposals that require a dedicated project budget and impact other departments.

Research Group

Research groups bring together researchers and external specialists from different disciplines to identify common issues, share perspectives and work collaboratively to agree on research projects for inclusion within a rolling triennial research plan. Research groups will be required for large projects and/or those that require an interdisciplinary perspective.

Process Map

RESEARCH PLANNING PROCESS
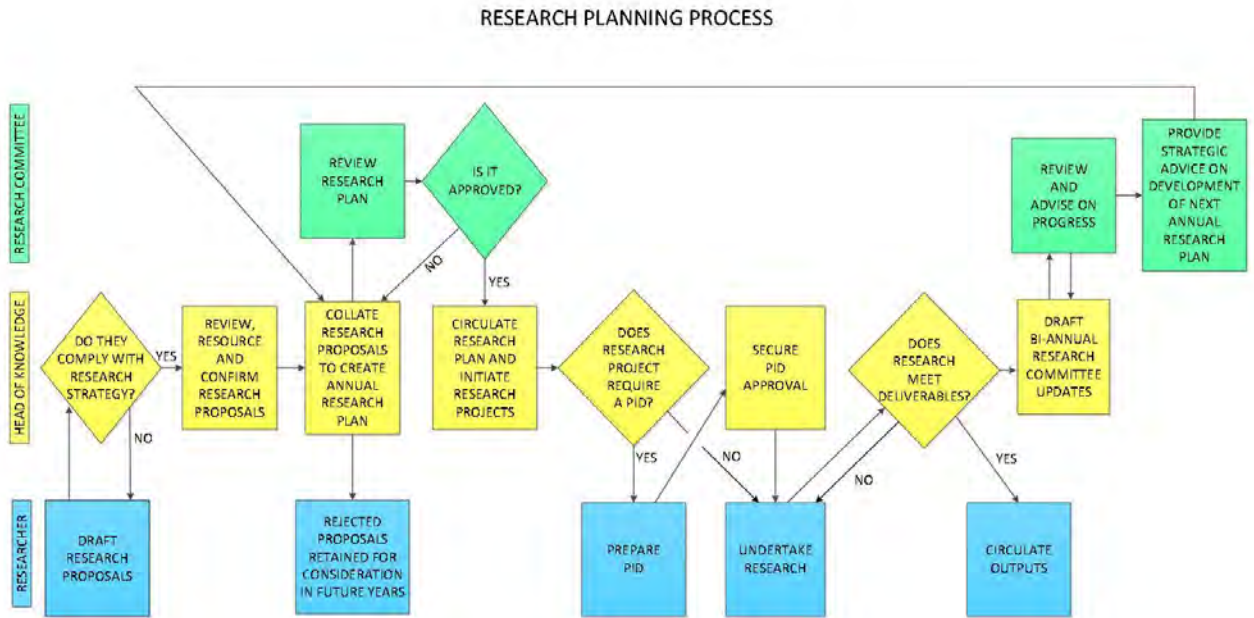
PITFALLS

A number of key challenges must be mitigated if the Research Strategy is to be delivered effectively. These are:

- Balancing research with other museum priorities

  Efficient management of staff time, the establishment of SMART deliverables within the department planning and work planning processes, and the trialling of new working practices (in particular the management of public enquiries) will be essential. Opportunities for remote working will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Full-time research (staff research fellowships) will be considered for approved projects as business requirements permit.

- Limited funding

  The museum and archives research funding is limited and will need to be carefully targeted, while new sources of external funding will need to be identified and secured. To this end, the amount of external research funding (from grants, sponsorship and donations or the levying of service charges where appropriate) must increase with researchers and the Head of Knowledge working more closely with the Development Department. Relationships with academic institutions must also continue to be strengthened.

- Undermanaged research associates

  The scope, outputs, resourcing and management of the museum and archives research associates and curator emeriti will require substantive review if their full potential is to be unlocked.

- Limited research students

  The museum and archives do not take advantage of student research opportunities. A research student program will be established with a focus on relevant research topics and quality outcomes.

- Limited space and facilities

  Provision of appropriate and flexible spaces will be needed to support team-based projects, research associates and research students.

- Limited collections data access

  Transfer of clean data to IMM will be completed as a matter of urgency. The potential for AToM to interact with web 2.0 will be fully realized.

- Limited digital infrastructure

  Research will require increased use of a range of digital tools and approaches to investigate, organize, map and create different forms of data on a regular basis. The provision of these tools, equipment, support and training in their use will require appropriate resourcing and will be considered in our Digital Strategy.

- Limited access to library and archival materials

  Funding for pay-to-access online resources, journals and e-books will be required to support in-house research. The re-establishment of the Royal BC Museum and Archives library will be considered.

PERFORMANCE

Key performance indicators (KPIs) will be reviewed and set annually within the rolling triennial research plan. The level at which KPIs are set will have due regard for previous performance, current capacity and resources, and the nature and focus of research during the upcoming 12 months. KPIs will be ambitious but achievable. Year-on-year growth will be expected.

Performance will be determined through the following **quantitative** measures:

- Number of projects

  Maintain a portfolio of research projects that directly support one or more of the research priorities. The target number of projects will be determined annually and specified within the research plan.

- Number of peer-reviewed publications

  Publish peer-reviewed publications or conference papers written by staff researchers, research associates, curator emeriti and doctoral students. The target number of publications will be determined annually and specified within the research plan.

- Amount of external funding

  The target level of external funding will be determined annually through consultation with researchers and the Development Department and specified within the research plan.

Performance will be determined through the following **qualitative** measure:

- Level of scholarship

  Peer reviewed articles, journals and books should be 'central points of reference' that make substantial contributions to their fields. It is recognized that the degree to which scholarly outputs may be considered 'central points of reference' is hard to measure. While peer-review status, download volume, publishing run and citation numbers are useful indicators, they are not the only ones. Appropriate metrics must be considered for every output across each discipline.